

## Narrative

### **1. Need and rationale**

Wyoming is characterized by vast open spaces and relatively few people. Nearly ninety-two percent of the state is classified as rural, with an average of only 5.2 inhabitants per square mile. In spite of its rural nature, Wyoming is home to eighty-one public libraries, more than seventy-five museums, twenty-three county historical societies, two tribal cultural centers, seven herbariums, nine state historic sites, and countless municipal, museum, church, and courthouse archives. Twenty-three Wyoming institutions responded to the Heritage Preservation's Heritage Health Index, giving a broad overview of the diversity of collections in the state. But little has been done statewide to organize collections care and develop a conservation initiative or statewide disaster response plan. The fact that Wyoming's collections are so widely dispersed and, in some cases, relatively isolated, presents a challenge for professionals charged with the stewardship of the state's collections. The goal of Wyoming's Connecting to Collections statewide planning project will be to provide an organizational structure that will foster a cooperative statewide effort of conservation, preservation, and preparation. To do this, we will:

- identify the state's collecting institutions and assess their preservation needs
- hold regional conferences for networking, collections care, disaster response training
- develop and maintain a statewide database of all collecting institutions
- organize workshops that address Heritage Health Index concerns

The Heritage Health Index has raised awareness across the nation about the critical state of our important collections. The findings that roughly one-third of institutions surveyed lack adequate knowledge of the condition of their collections, that half have no written long-range plan for collections care, and that eighty percent do not have emergency or disaster plans in place for collections is distressing, but not at all surprising. Each state is faced with its own unique conservation and preservation issues. Wyoming, for example, is home to Yellowstone, the world's first national park. Together with Grand Teton National Park to the south, the parks' visitor centers and small museums have collections documenting the cultural and natural history in the parks and the conditions of their resources. Yellowstone National Park's Heritage and Research Center includes museum objects, archives, and a research library, and some of its collections play a part in the resource management of these spectacular public lands. Wyoming's arid climate also poses a challenge for preservation of such disparate objects as quilts at the Campbell County Rockpile Museum, and saddles and tack at the Laramie Plains Museum. And the rural nature of the state makes networking among those responsible for the preservation and protection of collections difficult at best. Currently, Wyoming does not have a statewide disaster response plan for collections, nor do we have a comprehensive database identifying all cultural institutions and the types of collections they hold.

Throughout 2008, Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS) is offering workshops in disaster planning and response with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. As part of the rigorous schedule of training, two workshops were presented in Wyoming: one at the Homesteader Museum in Powell, and one at Laramie County Community College in Cheyenne. Participants at training sessions were provided with a template for a disaster

plan and a short list of responders for the state. Representatives from libraries, museums, and county courthouse archives were present, but the attendance was small and not nearly inclusive of Wyoming's collecting institutions. We need to ensure each collecting institution in Wyoming receives training in disaster planning and response and that every institution is part of a statewide network.

Prior to 2008, collecting institutions in Wyoming relied on the expertise of out-of-state conservators acting as consultants, principally from Colorado. In May 2008, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, hired Beverly Perkins, currently the only full-time staff conservator in the state. The Center also employs a full-time archivist. With more than 38,000 artifacts, 30,000 books, and 500,000 photographs, the Historical Center and its McCracken Research Library have urgent conservation and preservation needs. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center conservator has expertise in ceramics, wood, metal, glass, leather, feathers, plant fibers, taxidermy, painted surfaces, bone, and ivory. She also has advanced instruction in disaster mitigation and response for cultural collections and extensive experience with outreach and training. For this reason, and because the Center itself has such a diversity of collections, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center will serve as the lead institution for the Wyoming Connecting to Collections Statewide Planning Grant proposal.

To carry out the Connecting to Collections planning project, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center will partner with the Wyoming contingent of the Colorado-Wyoming Museum Association (CWAM). This organization exists to unite and serve all collecting institutions in Colorado and Wyoming. Member institutions include art museums, history museums, natural history museums, and historical sites. CWAM's annual meeting brings together professionals for workshops, plenary sessions, and presentations as well as tours of member institutions and networking opportunities. CWAM also hosts from four to six meetings throughout the year that will offer workshops addressing Heritage Health Index concerns and the needs identified during each regional conference. CWAM members will also help identify participants for the regional conferences and maintain a database containing contact information collected at each conference.

In addition to CWAM, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center will partner with four other collections-holding institutions in the state: the Wyoming State Library, the Sheridan County Historical Society Museum, Western Wyoming Community College (WWCC), and the Nicolaysen Art Museum (NIC). Designated as Leader Institutions, each represents a geographical area of the state and a collection that reflects Wyoming's diverse culture. Leader Institutions will play two key roles in the project: they will aid the project coordinator in locating collections personnel within their area, and they will host the initial planning and organizational conference for their area.

## **2. Planning process**

A part-time project coordinator will be hired in March 2009 to implement the project. The coordinator will serve as liaison between the partners designated as Leader Institutions. The project coordinator will draft a document that outlines the project and suggests a time frame, and he/she will discuss the document with the Leader Institutions. During this discussion, the project coordinator will create a database of collecting institutions in each geographic region, relying on CWAM's lists of libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, etc. already in existence, as well as on information supplied by the other five Leader Institutions. Each collecting institution will be

contacted and encouraged to participate in the project. Conversations with each institution will also include an informal survey of major conservation concerns addressed in the Heritage Health Index. At the end of this initial process, the project coordinator will compile results of the informal survey and distribute it to each collecting institution in the state, along with a proposed schedule of regional conferences that will take place over the next year. This information will also be placed on CWAM's Web site. Some Wyoming cultural institutions are closed during winter months, and conferences will be scheduled in the summer and early fall to accommodate those sites.

The regional conferences will consist of both networking and brainstorming opportunities as well as hands-on training sessions. Beverly Perkins, staff conservator for the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, will act as trainer and facilitator for each regional conference. Ms. Perkins is one of two professional conservators in Wyoming and the only American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) Fellow and AIC-CERT member in Wyoming. Ms. Perkins has extensive experience in disaster response training and in practical experience as a responder as well. She served as coordinator for the AIC volunteer response efforts after hurricane Katrina. Each morning session will begin with a discussion of collections in each individual institution so participants can identify the needs in their regions and begin to establish networks. Each participant will be given the opportunity to express their needs for education, public relations, and communication, and they will also be given the opportunity to discuss specific object needs. Each collecting institution's preservation capabilities and facilities will be added to the database developed by the project coordinator. Following the grant period, this database will be maintained by CWAM and published on their Web site.

In the afternoon, training in basic principles of preservation as well as disaster response planning will take place. In preliminary discussions, disaster planning has been mentioned as the most important concern among cultural institutions in the state. Each collecting institution represented will receive a basic collections care backpack containing such necessary items as a Beilstein test kit, an emergency response and salvage wheel, emergency response notebook and Western Association for Art Conservation (Waac) Salvage at a Glance chart, a dry cleaning screen, a dry cleaning brush, a magnifying head loop, and a sand snake. At the end of the day, we will have formed a regional network of professionals who will be able to assist smaller, remote institutions with important preservation work. We will also have laid the groundwork for a disaster response network. The goal of the regional conferences will be to gather information to build a statewide preservation and disaster response plan. We will identify urgent preservation needs of each participating collections care professional, and we will form a network in each area of the state that can respond as a team in the event of a disaster. The teams will share knowledge and expertise in matters of preservation and stewardship of collections.

We are confident the challenge of the fourth Heritage Preservation recommendation will become clearer by the end of the project. We believe a bi-product of the regional conferences will be to identify sources of private and public funding in communities across the state and to begin a statewide effort to approach the state legislature for support. With additional funding, a future goal is to hold emergency drills in each region of the state as institutions learn to work together. The plan would allow for institutions within each region to alternate hosting drills so members of the network learn first hand about collections in their area.

Three Wyoming statewide organizations have agreed to publicize and promote the Connecting to Collections planning project. The Wyoming Arts Council, the Wyoming Humanities Council, and the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund are state granting agencies and, as such, are in contact with Wyoming's cultural institutions throughout the year. All three agencies will encourage current and past grant recipients to participate in the project and to attend one of the planning meetings organized by the project coordinator. Information will be disseminated by these agencies through e-mails to grant recipients, through Web pages, and through the Wyoming Arts Council and Wyoming Humanities Council newsletters.

### **3. Project resources: budget and personnel**

The Buffalo Bill Historical Center will be the lead organization for this project and will provide fiduciary and grant management services. It is clear that contacting and surveying each collecting organization in the state will require sophisticated administrative skills. We have, therefore, requested funding for a project coordinator with excellent organizational qualities.

The regional conferences will allow for valuable interchange among participants, encouraging them to connect with professionals who share a concern for protecting Wyoming's diverse collections. The project director strongly believes that an introduction to disaster response planning and basic preservation training should also be a part of these day-long sessions. Each participating institution will take part in disaster response training and will receive a basic collections care kit.

We have also requested a modest amount for travel and subsistence for the project director and project coordinator to attend the regional conferences. The budget also allows for supporting funds for database maintenance and workshops addressing Heritage Health Index concerns.

Key personnel include a representative from each participating Leader Institution, as well as a project coordinator who will be hired by the project director and work out of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

**Beverly Perkins** will be project director for the Connecting to Collections project and will serve as the trainer and facilitator at all regional conferences. Perkins joined the Buffalo Bill Historical Center as Conservator in May 2008. Prior to that she was Western Region Field Service Officer at Balboa Art Conservation Center in California. Ms. Perkins is an AIC Fellow and an International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) Fellow. She is an AIC-CERT Team Member of Responders for Cultural Institutions. She served as volunteer responder coordinator for AIC from 2005 to May 2008. She has also served as a member of the AIC Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Committee and as chair in 2006-2007. Ms. Perkins has conservation expertise in ceramics, wood, metal, glass, leather, feathers, plant fibers, taxidermy, painted surfaces, bone, and ivory. Ms. Perkins holds a BA in art history from Denison University in Granville, Ohio; an MA in art history from The University of Chicago; MA, CAS (Certificate of Advanced Study) from the State University College at Buffalo; and has completed the Cooperstown Conservation Program. She also studied semesters at the University of Hawai'i, and the Institute of European Studies in Paris, France.

**Teresa Beyer-Sherwood** has been on the board of directors of CWAM for two years and will be the liaison between the Buffalo Bill Historical Center and CWAM. She currently serves as the CWAM workshop coordinator and will facilitate the CWAM workshops in response to needs expressed during the regional conferences. Beyer-Sherwood is Curator/Public Historian at the Wyoming Territorial Prison State Historical Site. She recently served as project director for the 2006/2007 *Save Our History* grant from the History Channel entitled “Unlocking Secrets in the Soil.” She has presented public programs at the American Heritage Center, the American Association for State and Local History, and the Colorado-Wyoming Association of Museums. Beyer-Sherwood has reviewed grants for the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Ms. Beyer-Sherwood holds a BA in history from Piedmont College in Georgia and an MA in public history and museum studies from the State University of West Georgia.

**Lesley Boughton** has served as Wyoming State Librarian for nine years and will be the liaison between this state agency and the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Boughton served as library director of Natrona County Public Library (1995 - 1998); Carbon County Library System (1988 – 1995); and Platte County Public Library (1980 – 1988). She has also served as president of the board of trustees of the Bibliographical Center for Libraries (BCR) and is currently a state library trustee on the BCR board.

**Dana Prater** has been director and curator of the Sheridan County Historical Society Museum since 2003 and will act as liaison between the museum and the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. Prater directed a collections assessment project for the Society that led to establishing a museum for Sheridan County. She recently co-authored *Images of America: Sheridan*, winner of the Wyoming State Historical Society award in 2008.

**Laurie Watkins** is Associate Vice President for Student Success Services at Western Wyoming Community College. She will serve as the contact person for the college. In addition to strengthening student services programs, developing an alumni association, and providing international student support, Watkins is also responsible for maintaining campus museum collections. The community college has both an art gallery and a natural history museum.

**Holly Turner** is Executive Director of the Nicolaysen Art Museum and will be the contact person for the NIC. She has led the museum in successful fundraising events as well as organizing exciting exhibitions and increasing educational programming. Before Turner joined the Nicolaysen in 2002, she was executive director of the Wyoming Symphony Orchestra in Casper.

A part-time **project coordinator** will be hired with grant funds. The coordinator will communicate closely with the contact person from each Leader Institution, and together they will identify all participants within each geographic region. The coordinator will create a database of participants identifying, among other things, conservation supplies and disaster response equipment available at each location. The project coordinator will also work with the Leader Institutions to plan a one-day conference in each region.